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ABSTRACT

A case study of the impact of modest scholarships on the education of poor, rural Chinese girls found a "bonus effect"--an increase in the value placed on female scholarship recipients by their village. In mountainous Shaanxi Province, poor economic conditions led to many girls dropping out of school by grade 4. In one village, the All-China Women's Federation awarded small scholarships in 2000 and 2001 to help female dropouts return to school. Recipients included 14 elementary students and 6 secondary students, 5 of whom attended boarding school. All the girls were chosen due to severe financial difficulties in their family. Additional information on 12 families and interviews with some of the girls revealed no surplus resources or assets in the family. Nevertheless, all the girls persisted in their school attendance on only a minimal scholarship. Some fathers made extraordinary efforts and borrowed money well beyond their means, actions that fly in the face of logic about "long-term return on investment." Given the poor economic conditions of the village, school did not promise a return on investment for these girls, and their devotion to schooling appeared to be to schooling per se. It is suggested that traditional Confucian values regarding education combined with a modern disposition allowing girls a new flexibility of role or identity. The scholarships increased this flexibility of attitude on the part of fathers, and they responded to their daughters' passion for schooling with compassion and parental support. An appendix presents data on the recipients. (SV)

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Partnerships with Girls in Rural Schools in China: A Case Study

by
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For presentation at the Comparative International Education Society Annual Meeting, Orlando, Florida, on March 5-9, 2002

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The Issue – What's the problem?

My beloved, adopted daughter of China has brought home for me, literally, in a most profound way, the devaluation, rejection, and ostracism of girls at the point of poverty in Chinese culture. The decision that deprives a girl child of dreams for a meaningful future just because she is a girl must be painful to parents, though buffered by millennia of tradition.

Yet international trends and survey data have demonstrated ad infinitum the extent to which girls continue to face discrimination and limited life chances,[1] particularly in poor regions and developing countries (Stephens, 2000). Around the world some 73 million school-age girls were not in school at the turn of the millennium (Annan 2000).[2] It is generally understood that girls' lack of access to schooling is strongly affected by the macro economic environment as well as the family's socio economic status, but also by often ancient cultural practices.[3] In many parts of the world, "educating a daughter is a waste of time and money. They ... decided to use their scarce resources for their son's education at the expense of their daughters," cited Kofi Annan (2000), Secretary-General of the United Nations, in a speech preparing for the Second World Education Forum (26-28 April 2000, Dakar, Senegal).

The subordinate status of girls and women in historical China is practically legendary. It persists today, even after 40 years of egalitarian policies in some important areas instituted by the early Communist government and Party. In 2000 the Chinese government[4] officially recognized that a part of the school drop out rate is "owing to the prejudice of regarding men as superior to women". China's Education For All Committee's review of the drop out issue published for the Dakar Second World Conference on Education for All[5] proclaimed that during the 1990s ,

> A lot of work has been done to curb the dropping-out of school pupils, the general trend is a gradual decline of drop-out rates, with ups and downs in the course of advance.[6] .... The findings of other studies indicate that the drop-out rates in rural lower secondary schools are far higher than that in urban schools, and the drop-out rates of girls are much higher than that of boys, and the drop-out rates in poor areas are higher than that in economically developed areas. As to the cause of dropping-

out, economic difficulties faced by poor families constitute the main cause in rural and poor areas; in economically developed areas, population mobility and the need for help in home-based production or in household chores contribute to dropping-out.

Rong and Shi (2001)[7] cite the 1990 census to show gender inequity in educational attainment. Across all levels of schooling, of the 2.73 million school-age children not in school, 82 percent were female, and of the official 3 million school drop outs, 76 percent were female (p. 114). Using 4 categories of economic development to classify regions of China, Rong and Shi report that in 1996 in the most developed region, 27.2 percent of schooled women, age 6 and over, completed only primary schooling, whereas in the least developed region 59 percent did so. The less developed the regions, the more exacerbated the educational disadvantages for females (p.115).[8]

I cannot address the issue of net enrollment of the age group and its gender gap, although it may show how large non-enrollment in schooling is. The EFA Committee of China (2000) revealed that no statistics exist, in the census data or elsewhere, that would allow for an assessment of either gross and net intake rates, not to mention disaggregated data by gender. Therefore we cannot know to what extent girls are staying out of school entirely. But perhaps the distinction between staying out of school, late entry and dropping out is only technical.

Other important factors in schooling belong under the heading of retention, such as early leaving, interruptions and grade repetition. Girls who stayed through to graduate suffered more interruptions and drop out-ism along the way than boys did. [9]

Interruptions and drop out-ism looks followingly up close. A colleague at Shaanxi Normal University (SNU) told me in 2000 of a girl in a remote rural village, who was a year older than her son was still in fourth grade, wheras her son had tested into senior high school grade 9. The girl had started school nine years earlier in 1991, and due to illness in the family had interrupted her schooling many times. She was now 15 years old. What had she retained from the first three years of schooling that she got over the course of 9 years?

My colleague, Professor Lin Zhao, told me this story while I was participating in a conference on

girls' education and gender equity at SNU. She mentioned that she had been overseeing a rural education project for girls, a scholarship fund to pay the school-related fees of girls who had dropped out of school as early as fourth grade. The poverty was so deep that a mere $10 a year would enable the girls' return to school. I was particularly struck by Lin Zhao's description of a side effect, however. A larger issue loomed behind the poverty that forced these girls out of school. Zhao told that the scholarships had had a wider impact on the village as a whole. The villagers saw the scholarship girls who had returned to school as "little intellectuals", and they paid them a newfound respect. The girls had acquired status, value in their eyes through the receipt of the scholarships. Perhaps inexplicably to them, it was girls that were valued by the sponsors of the scholarships. The girls acquired a cache as a "worthwhile investment".

Thesis

Millennia of tradition may have made the devaluation of girls acceptable in Chinese culture and common place in a forced choice produced by poverty. Yet the parental Solomonic decision to deprive a girl child of her dreams and a meaningful future must be a tragedy rather avoided.

Is it possible that the provision of a few Ren Min Bi (RMB) in scholarship money could return girl children to school and keep them there? Is it the financial boost that overcomes the cultural attitudes or assumptions? Or is it the cultural assumption that is suddenly placed in question by the cultural significance of the scholarship? Is this cultural psychological dissonance strong enough to counteract the demands of the dire economic straits, in which these families live, wherein a mere 100 RMB frees a daughter to attend school for a year?

I suggest that in this situation, the financial realities and cultural assumptions are inextricably intertwined. I suggest that the place value of these girl-scholarships is uncommonly high in the poorest villages of China where girls have extraordinarily little opportunity.

The early experience with the scholarships recounted by Professor Zhao points to this phenomenon. It suggests that the "value" of girls to their families inheres in more than their short-term opportunity cost or long term private investment returns – despite millennia of cultural traditions that seem to

indicate just this cultural assumption.

I suggest that there is a "bonus effect" produced by the scholarships that helps transcend the demands of absolute poverty and that changes the place value of girls in the village. This bonus effect or factor may be related to Confucian respect for education per se, or to a combination of this traditional value with a modern disposition toward role flexibility and economic opportunity.

It is my hope that investigating the circumstances and effects of girls dropping out of school and returning by means of a "deus-ex-machina" intervention like a scholarship can tell us more regarding the achievement of gender equity at the entrance of the education pathway, basic education.

The strengths of a case-study approach which draws on both quantitative and qualitative data seems to be called for as we contemplate post-Education for All Decade policy alternatives.

It is my hope that the preliminary findings, stories really, that I can present after two years of a small case study will go toward convincing the audience of the value of such a methodology for identifying the "bonus effect" which I hypothesize.

Literature Review

In many parts of the world, the past few decades have seen increased opportunities, such as increased levels of enrolment in schools, for all children, both boys and girls. However, we are far from universal access to primary schooling in general and far from eliminating the gap between boys' and girls' access (Stephens, 2000)[10].

Recently qualitative studies have gotten a bit closer to figuring out what is going on - on the ground - with girls' access to schooling. Stephens and Colclough (2000)[11] in their study of gender and schooling in Ethiopia and Guinea found that cultural and economic factors intertwine to produce gendered outcomes. This challenges the obviously overly simplistic notion that economic development organically leads to improved opportunities for girls. Colclough et al. and Stephens

looked into what they call 'adverse cultural practices' and found them to have importance particularly in rural areas. They found that discrimination in the labour market reinforced the gendered division of labor within the household.

Findings

The Setting

China's population is nearly 1.3 billion, more than four times that of the U.S. About 66 percent of the population live in its demographic heartland; the other 34 percent inhabit the high "hinterlands". The heartland lies along the eastern coast of China ranging between 150 to 600 miles inland, a land of fertile and intensively cultivated plains sustaining a dense population. Towering above and beyond is the hinterland, remote, high, cold and poor, stretching about 2,000 miles farther to the west into Central Asia. Though 78 percent of China's land surface, less than 22 percent of its GNP is produced here. Except for the Chengdu Plain, the Changjiang [Yangtze] river basin, and the Northeastern Plain, the land is mountainous, largely infertile, harbors unknown mineral wealth, yet extreme poverty, especially among the ethnic minority peoples, most of whom live in these areas.[12] This is where our village is located.

The Northwestern Plain is bordered on its southern edge by a massive mountain ridge. North of the Qinling Mountains the mountains and hills meander to the Gobi Dessert toward Mongolia. The Plain is cut through by the Wei and Yellow River, providing some relief and a swath of fertile lands. Our village, Shi Wen Gou Village is one of 632 villages in the Shang Zhou District of Shaanxi Province, located on eastern edge of the Qinling Mountains, in the Southeast corner of the province.

Economic Circumstances

Although, the per capita gross domestic product (GDP) reached 6,534 RMB, or $789, in 1999, thereby graduating from the World Bank list of "low income countries" (SSB 2000, WB 2001), our corner of Shaanxi has seen little improvement of circumstances for many decades. In 1999 in Shang Zhou District the average per capita income was 822 RMB or $100. Though relying mostly on agriculture, there were only 0.5 mu of field per person. The poorest in the District however had only 0.06 mu of land to till, and an average per capita income of 692 RMB ($84). This is due to the

rugged mountainous environment, poor roads, and a "backward" economy. There were no public roads to some villages, 100 villages were without regular electricity, more than 10,000 people did not have access to safe water (Shang Zhou ACWF 2000).[13] Shi Wen Gou Village [Stone Jar Ravine] was composed of 82 families and 382 people. Their average annual income was 680 RMB ($83) and several families were below the official poverty line (Shi Wen Gou Village Government, 2000).[14]

Drop Out

In the District, the poor economic conditions lead to school drop out problems and the production of many new illiterates. In 1999 there were more than 3,400 early school leavers, of which 2,380 or 70 percent were girls. The Shang Zhou All-China Women's Federation (ACWF) "Spring Buds Program" set up special classes for more than 200 girls and sponsored another 108 to return to school. Another 318 girls from very poor homes faced the risk of dropping out (Shang Zhou ACWF 2000).[15]

The head of the ACWF of Shang Zhou District, Ms. Yingying Yang (2002),[16] wrote that Shi Wen Gou Village is one of these poor villages. Because the people face many difficulties, many children drop out of school. In 1999 in the village primary school in the class of 56 students, 17 or 30 percent dropped out, all due to poverty (Shi Wen Gou Village Government, 2000). Ten girls among them were in the most dire circumstances and were forced to drop out by grade 4 (Shang Zhou ACWF 2000). There were few hopes that girl students would continue on to high school (Shi Wen Gou Village Government, 2000).

Ex-Deus-Machina - The Guanlan Scholarship

The ACWF administered the Guanlan Scholarship in Shi Wen Go Village. This was a logical choice given local capacities, but, additionally, the ACWF official Yingying Yang is a personal friend of Professor Lin Zhao. She is also the deputy head of the District administration. She sent the following report after for 2 years of operation. Since the spring of the year 2000, 20 girls who had dropped out of school were able to return to school due to receiving a "Guanlan Scholarship". These girls have stayed in school since then, have studied hard, were very encouraged by the

concern shown by "Guanlan's mother" and "Teacher Zhao", and enjoyed their school lessons.

I'd like to briefly describe the event organized for the first presentation of the Guanlan Scholarship to illustrate the almost surreal phenomenon that this scholarship represents. Professor Zhao traveled for hours into the mountains and over dangerous roads to the District headquarters. From here she continued with a phalanx of official cars on the arduous trip to the village to deliver the scholarship awards and certificates. It was such a momentous event that the District television station sent a news crew along to record it. The gate to the school compound was covered with large welcoming signs and the entire school population sat in the schoolyard facing the long dais. The District officials were seated behind three long tables as Professor Zhao and ACWF Official Yang handed certificates to the girls. (J) as the oldest recipient who was returning to school after 4 years gave a heartfelt speech expressing the girls' and their families' deepest gratitude. The speech was also dotted with official slogans of struggle to advance the local economy (J, 2000),[17] reflecting the importance that officials of the state had in this event.

The 10 girls who re-entered school in 2000, were those mentioned above; girls from the most dire family circumstances. They were described as also having good grades. Of them, the ACWF (2002) table shows that in 2001, 2 students were continuing in grade 4, 1 in grade 5, 3 in grade 6, 4 enrolled in junior secondary.[18] One student (B) from this first group, one and a half years ago, due to her mother's chronic illness and her own, was overwhelmed by economic hardship and had to drop out of school for 3 months. After the village gave the family some assistance, and the Guanlan scholarship, B returned anew to school in September, and her situation has improved a little by now. In 2001 an additional 10 girls received scholarships and re-entered school. The Guanlan Scholarships have paid mainly for the cost of books and school fees for students without the financial resources.

The 14 scholarship students who attended Zhongfeng Consolidated Primary, walked between 3 and 6 kilometers to school; in the rugged terrain, with poor roads, these distances were not an easy walk. The one student who had a 6-km walk received lunch in school, apparently for no fee. Fees for primary school students in grades 3 through 6 broke down followingly, books at 98.5 RMB or $23, miscellaneous $10, and insurance $3, for a total of 206 RMB or $25. The cost of primary school

constituted 30 percent of the 680 RMB local average income per person.

The 5 girls who attended Beikuanping Junior High School, located 9 km from the village, boarded at the school. Their boarding costs, cook's fee, miscellaneous and 4.50 RMB ($ 0.55) per day, dormitory lodging fee of 95 RMB, plus a book fee of 100 RMB altogether amounted to 1,021 RMB or $125, one and a half times the 680 RMB local average income per person.

The one student, who attended Zhangcun Township Senior High School, located 15 km from the village, traveled by car but lived at the school. The fees were 45 RMB less than at Beikuanping Junior High School, but the school "loaned" the student 200 RMB, so her fees were only 776 RMB or $95.

The scholarship, however, covered only 100 RMB the first and 150 RMB the second year of the total cost. The families made up the difference. For families of secondary school students the fees and expenses were bound to be prohibitive.

"The local government, school, people, and families of the scholarship recipients are very grateful for the support and encouragement of the work of the school, and will see to it that the students will develop in a healthy fashion: that will study diligently, grow healthy, and fulfill the expectations of Guanlan's mother and teacher Zhao. The Women's Association will manage the money well and hope to continue to work together with Guanlan's mother and teacher Zhao to assure and develop for the students a good environment" (Shang Zhou ACWF, 2002).

The Scholarship Students

The student registration records appear to be the most accurate records of the various accounts I have received.[19] They tell us that in the first group of scholarship recipients ages ranged from 10 to 15 years (3 were 10, 1 was 11, 2 were 13, 2 were 14 and 2 were 15). The girls had first entered school somewhere between 1991 and 1996, 1 in 1991, 2 in 1993, 3 in 1995, and 4 in 1996. They had dropped out of school for periods ranging from ½ to 4 years (3 for ½ year, 2 for 1 ½ year, 2 for 2, 2 for 3, and 1 for 4 years). Although they were all listed as enrolled in grade 4, some of the school entrance and drop out terms do not correspond.

Drop Out/Late Entrance

The case of several of the students illustrates the mere technicality of the late-entrance drop out distinction. Among the first group of scholarship recipients, one of the 15-year-olds (C) first entered school in 1991 at age 6. Over the next 8 years, she dropped out for 4 years, and in 2000 was to enroll in grade 4. Another 15-year-old (J) did not even enter school till 1995 at age 10. Over the subsequent 4 years, the record said she dropped out for 2 years, and was listed as enrolled in grade 4 on her 2000 registration record. Of all the 4th graders, 3 (B, D and C) had been out of school for 3 or more years, another 2 (I and J) for 2 years. It is questionable that any these 5 students retained much of their three or four years of education prior to 2000. However, in 2001, all but 2 students were promoted, some skipped 2 to 4 years ahead, catching up with their age group. Perhaps social promotion was practiced here.

Among the second group of scholarship recipients, figuring the common entrance age of 7, 2 students (L, T) were 1 year overage for their grade, 4 (K, N, O,) were the appropriate age for their grade, and 3 (M Q, R) were underage for their current enrollment grade. It is possible that either the grade or the age given in the ACWF 2002 table listing the students is inaccurate.

All together, of the 20 students, 9 were either late entry or drop out students. For these students, there had been some interruption in their schooling. Whether these students had entered late or dropped out in between seems irrelevant. Among the 20, 8 started on the scholarship in grade 4. Some of them had spent little time in school and it is questionable that they had learned much.[20] However, their schooling apparently had other kinds of meaning, as their stories and their persistence reveals.

Economic Constraints

All of the 20 girls (A-T) were chosen due to financial difficulties in the family. Of the 10 girls who received scholarships in the first round (A-I), 8 had one or two consistently sick parents. In 4 families the mothers were listed as sick and in 1 family the mother had died. In these remote farming villages, the main income producing adult is typically the father. However, the burden on

the daughter for gender related household chores would increase. In these 5 families the opportunity cost of the daughter's attending school would be high.

In 1 family the father was disabled, which would put a heavy burden on all family members and threaten their survival. In the 2 families where both mother and father were ill, their survival threat would be grave. In both these cases, the opportunity cost of the daughter's attending school could be harmful to the survival of the family. The 2 families without financial resources can be understood to be on the brink of collapse.

For the family of E whose father was disabled more information was available on the school record. E was 10 years old, her father, age 30, was a *poor farmer* (social class label) with an annual income of 380 RMB. The mother, age 38, also was classified a poor farmer. Both parents were often ill. The family was listed as having no economic resources. Since there were 4 in the family, there was a sibling, sex unknown. The family was listed as a *severe poverty household.* Without outside assistance, this family could survive. It can be assumed that the opportunity cost of 1 daughter's schooling would be too burdensome to bear.

For the family of J, one of the oldest students at 14, more information was available. Her father, age 37, and mother, age 35, were farmers, classified as poor farmers. Their annual income was 405 RMB, and there were 4 mouths to feed. Since J was relatively old compared with her mother's age; it can be assumed that her sibling was younger. Her family was considered to be in very poor economic circumstances, "no financial resources". There was no listing of illness. To give up J's labor power at her age, whether in the home or in the field, would be a loss to the family, who were possibly just barely sustaining themselves.

No information on family circumstances were provided for the second group of scholarship recipients (K-T), but the fees to be paid were listed (see above).

Stories of Family Circumstances and Decisions

The stories told by the scholarship recipients themselves convey a fuller understanding of their

situation and the role of the scholarship intervention. One student (T) from the second group of scholarship recipients, was 14 years old, and she wrote,

> My home is in a mountain village that is hard to reach, we don't know from one day to the next what our financial situation is. I am a fifth grader and, although we are poor, my daddy used to borrow money from the neighbors so I could go to school. But in the end, because we three sisters were all in school, farming our field could not support us any more and even the borrowed money wasn't enough. In the end, no one would lend dad any more money, so he didn't let me go to school anymore. He said I was grown now, I should stop and let my little sister go to school for a while. I also knew that dad and mom had many burdens and the pressure was really great, so that is how I dropped out of school. But then, Guanlan's mother heard of our difficulties and you made it possible for me to return to school. I will never forget you, ... if it wasn't for your support; I would now be at home grazing the cow.

A fourth grade student (P) also from the second group of recipients, who was 14 years old, and she wrote,

> In our village we depend on farming and in my house we did not have anything much put aside. It was difficult for my parents to support my going to school. I often heard them talk about not letting me continue, but I would always cry and tell them I wanted to go to school. I feared the day that I would have to go home and soon it arrived.
>
> Not long after the beginning of the school, the school was collecting the fees. Dad said, ' We have no money in the house to send to school, come home. When you see the hopelessness in your mother's eyes about all the money being gone, you won't have the heart to ask for money to study.' When I heard dad's words, I cried, and when he saw that, a tear dropped from his eyes. Dad is very strong, he never cries, but that day he shed a tear. I had to listen to dad and return home.
>
> Not long after I got home, I heard the village cadre say, 'Guanlan's mother is coming here to help students who dropped out of school.' When I heard that I got

unbelievably happy, and two days later, really, Auntie Zhao Lin came to our village to rescue us drop out students. I returned to campus, to start on a new path, to realize the dream I have had forever.

A ninth grade student (C) from the first group of recipients wrote,

> Because here our mountains are high and ravines are deep, our economy and culture is backward. In addition my mother is ill, has been on medicine for years, dad makes a little bit of money, not enough to cover the household expenses, there isn't enough to send my brother and me to school. Just as I had dropped out of school, several of us heard that Auntie is not afraid of the mountain roads, takes on the difficulties to come because of us drop out girls, to bring us your – Guanlan's mother's help. I want to express here my deepest gratitude and highest respect, and send our beloved Guanlan's mother our warmest regards.
>
> Thinking back on my time out of school, I would wish upon wish that I could grab my book bag, and go to school. How I longed for knowledge, how many times I dreamed I was back in the classroom listening excitedly to the teacher lecture. After waking up, I would cry and cry. One time, I said to my father, 'Let me go to school' and father just shook his head. Now, I can once again sit in the classroom and study! I treasure this opportunity to go to school, to study well, and learn well the skills and strive diligently to make our local economy advance rapidly.[21] I write of the real situation here not to burden Guanlan's mother, but to thank you from the bottom of my heart.

Discussion

None of the 12 families about whom we have more detailed information regarding their family financial circumstances and economic resources appear to have any kind of surplus or assets. Indeed there was not one were there were sufficient resources to send the girls to school. How it is that 6 of 20 recipients attend a residential junior high school is not evident. The Guanlan Scholarship contribution of 150 RMB covers a bit over 10 percent of the fees of the residential junior high school.

The other argument for girls not going to school is the opportunity cost. Girls above a certain age, in China that seems to be around the age of 9 or 10, can be substantial help not only in the home taking care of siblings, sick or elderly relatives, but also doing many of the onerous and time consuming household chores, as well as tending to household gardens and animals. One of the girls mentioned grazing the cow as what she would be doing instead of going to school. In no case did this factor get mentioned as preventing the girls from returning to school, despite the ample evidence of insufficient resources, labor power included, in the home.

Financial realities, the economic and human labor resources of the families as well as the fees for school, the opportunity cost of schooling, all appear so overwhelming that it is a complete wonder that these 20 girl are attending school on a minimal scholarship. Since this was the case for every one of the 20 girls, I conclude that another factor they all had in common accounted for it. Given the dire circumstances of the families, no factors involving force could explain the result. It must be concluded that the financial realities appeared to be inextricably intertwined with cultural assumptions. One case illustrates this conclusion most clearly.

The father of student (A) borrowed money way beyond his means to repay to send not only 1 but also 3 daughters to school. He negotiated to keep as many as possible in school. Both of these actions fly in the face of a long-term return on investment calculation. He chose the youngest who could do the least to help at home to stay the longest. This would evidence some consideration of short-term opportunity-cost. In this story the Confucian importance of education comes out in the father's commitment to schooling, but with a twist, a modern application of it to girl children, role flexibility.

Conclusion

The supposition that the place value of these girl-scholarships is uncommonly high in the poorest villages of China where girls have extraordinarily little opportunity for any activity other than chores and work in the short run. Schooling seems to be the only opportunity for growth evidenced here. Yet schooling or anything else does not appear to offer any long-term opportunity for improvements of life chances for girls. Schooling does not promise a return on investment for girls. No student mentioned dreams of how they would benefit from school to improve their life chances. Fathers must have seen

this as well. In the traditional frame of mind, this would be a tacit understanding and appear normal. Yet these fathers and families returned their daughters to school on but minimal financial assistance, not even enough to cover the full cost of schooling.

Perhaps the modern disposition toward role flexibility allowed the parents to think of their daughters in terms other than as a loss of long-term investment. Being able to consider their daughters flexibly left fathers free to value education for them.

The girls' devotion to schooling appeared to be to schooling per se, which we could call a Confucian notion with a modern value twist making it applicable to girls. It is likely that because remote villages are more prone to cultural maintenance to carry on traditions, that where education has an inherent value, it can combine with a modern impulse to apply it to girls as well as boys, and result in valuing schooling for girls.

The "value" of girls to their families inheres in more than their short-term opportunity cost or long term private investment returns – despite millennia of cultural traditions that seem to indicate just this cultural assumption. The explanation I suggest is that financial realities were inextricably intertwined with cultural assumptions that were a combination of traditional Confucian values regarding education and a modern disposition that allowed girls a new flexibility of role or identity, one that enabled desperately poor parents to send their daughters off to school.

There is the possibility that a "bonus effect" was produced by the scholarships that helped transcend the demands of absolute poverty and changed the place value of girls in the village. This bonus effect may be related to Confucian respect for education linked with a modern disposition toward role flexibility in economic opportunity. The modern disposition on the part of the farmer was in part structured by his correct perception that the lack opportunities for improved life chances in the village was not normal but bad for his daughters. He therefore responded to their passion to return to school with compassion and parental support – Solomonic justice lived.

It is my hope that investigating the circumstances and effects of girls dropping out of school and returning by means of a "ex- deus-machina" intervention like a scholarship can tell us more regarding

the achievement of gender equity at the entrance of the education pathway, basic education.

As is generally understood, girls' access to schooling is strongly influenced by poverty and the family's socio economic status in this case study as well. There existed also an underlying environment of discrimination against girls about participation in school as evidenced by their absolute majority among school dropouts in the District.

The structure of the school, teachers' behavior and skills, curriculum effects are not evidenced as constraints on girls' participation in this case study. The girls expressed a single-minded passion to return to school no matter what. I would anticipate that the structure of schooling, in this case the fact that secondary school is a boarding school, would impact girls' access but mainly or only through the financial not cultural factor. Families had not expressed any hesitancy about girls participating in schooling other than their financial ability to support them and survive.

The strengths of a case study approach which draws on both quantitative and qualitative data I hope is clear from this preliminary study. The way that concerns were voiced by village families complicates our picture and gives us new beginnings to address in policy.

Systemic Interventions

The Guanlan scholarship may be a worthy project. But it is not nearly enough. In 1998 in Shaanxi Province alone, 2.8 million students attend rural primary schools constituting 56 percent of all primary students in the province (SSB 1999, 20-30). Many of these students experience conditions much like our small case study.

According to The EFA 2000 Assessment: Country Reports, the

> Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO) have made important contributions to enable dropouts to return to school besides the efforts of governmental bodies concerned. Among the projects sponsored by these NGOs, the Hope Project initiated by the Children's Foundation of China (CFC) and the "Spring Buds Program" sponsored by the

> All-China Women's Federation (ACWF) are outstanding. CFC initiated the Hope Project in October 1989 and by the end of 1998 donations totaling 1.6 billion yuan have been received, and the money available has been used to support the construction of over 7000 "Hope Primary Schools" and to set up over 10000 "Hope Libraries", and to provide grants-in-aid to 2,090,000 drop-outs from poor families to enable them to return to school. The "Spring Buds Program" sponsored by ACWF in collaboration with the Children's Foundation of China aims to help girls from poor families to attend school, and its implementation has enabled 750,000 out of school girls to attend or return to schools.

The "Spring Buds Program" sponsored by the ACWF had a presence in the District. However, there is no direct evidence that girls in our village of Shi Wen Gou were directly affected. The District ACWF official mentioned that the village government helped the families of 2 of the scholarship recipients with extensive illness and no financial resources or income, so that the girls could continue in school (Shang Zhou ACWF, 2002).

As UN Secretary Annan said in spring 2000 on the occasion of the Second World Forum,

> The world needs a co-ordinated strategy on the scale of the challenge. We need all those with the power to change things to come together in an alliance for girls' education: government, voluntary progressive groups and above all, local communities, schools and families. That is why this spring, the United Nations is launching a new global initiative to educate girls.

Already in the 12th century AD, the Arab philosopher Ibn Rushd declared that "a society which enslaves its women is society doomed to decay." Nine hundred years later, let us prove that a society which empowers its women is a society sure to succeed.

APPENDIX

On July 9, 2001, In Shi Wen Gou Village in Shang Zhou in Shaanxi we awarded the Guanlan scholarship (150RMB) to each of the 20 students as below. Ten of them were in their second year.

Table 1. 20 Scholarship Student Circumstances

Name	Grade 2001*	Grd 2000^	Age^	Birth yr ^	SchoolEntr^	Drop Duratn^	Special Circumstances^
1- H	6	4	13	1986.7	1995.9	1 ½ yrs	father&mother longterm illness
1- I	8	4	14	1985.4	1996.9	2 yrs	mother longterm very sick
1- D	6	4	13	1987.3	1993.9	3 yrs	mother died of illness
1- B	9	4	14	1985.6	1993.9	3 yrs	mother long term illness
1- E	6	4	10	1989.7	1996.9	½ yr**	father disabled
1- F	4	4	10	1989.2	1996.9	½ yr	father ill in hospital
1- C	9	4	15	1984.12	1991.9	4 yrs	no financial resources
1- J	7	4	15	1984.10	1995.91	2 yrs***	no financial resources
1- A	4	4	11	1989.4	1995.9	1 ½ yrs	mother ill
1- G	5	4	10	1990.1	1996.9	½ yr	father mother both ill
					SchoolEntr Age		
2- K	7		14	^ na	7^^		^na
2- L	4		12		8		
2- M	5		10		5		
2- S	5		11		6		
2- T	6		14		8		
2- Q	6		10		4		
2- R	10		14		4		
2- N	4		11		7		
2- O	3		10		7		
2- P	6		13		7		

Sources: * AWCF 2002 table (not summary). ^ School registration forms, made out August/Sept 1999, or from Guanlan Scholarship. (2000.5.22). ^^ Calculated by subtracting school grade from age.

** (E) long display: father, age 30, farmer, poor farmer class, 380 RMB annual income, 4 in family; mother, 38, farmer , poor

farmer class, 380 RMB income; parents both often ill, have no economic resources, severe poverty household.
*** (J) long display: father, age 37, farmer, poor farmer class, 405 RMB annual income, 4 in family; mother, 35, farmer , poor farmer class, 380 RMB income, live as farmers, economic situation is very poor ...[?]
School registration records not available, therefore no Birth yr ^, SchoolEntr^, Drop Duratn^, Special Circumstances^.

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ENDNOTES

[1] Stephens D. (2000). Girls and schooling in developing countries, International Journal of Educational Development 20, 1–3. Available at http://www.elsevier.com/locate/ijedudev

[2] United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan (2000) Education for all girls. Speech, cited in Daily News, March 9, 2000.

[3] Poverty and cultural attitudes, both macro and micro, are named as the major impediments to equity in education in all dimensions, regional, gender, ethnic, etc. according to the EFA, 2000.

[4] Chinese Ministry of Education and the National Commission of the People's Republic of China for UNESCO, China EFA Assessment Coordination Committee (EFA Committee). (2000). Section 2.4 Drop-out rates have been effectively curbed, The EFA 2000 Assessment: Country Reports: China. Available at http://www2.unesco.org/wef/countryreports/china/rapport_2_1.html
Statistics were to be analyzed in accordance with the suggestions given in the Technical Guidelines for the EFA 2000 Assessment.

[5] The First World Conference on Education for All--Meeting Basic Learning Needs, held at Jomtien, Thailand, 5-9 March 1990 was convened and sponsored by UNESCO, UNICEF, UNDP, and the World Bank. Ending the Decade of Educaiton for All was the Second World Forum, held 26-28 April 2000, Dakar, Senegal.
The International Consultative Forum on Education for All published several compendia of assessment. Available at http://www.unesco.org/education/efa/efa_2000_assess/index.shtml

[6] Where in 1990 the drop out rate in primary school stood at 2.4, in 1995 it had dropped to 1.5 and in 1998 to 0.9. For junior high school, internationally known as lower secondary school, the rate in 1990 was 4.8 and increased to 8.1 in 1994, whereafter it dropped precipitously to 4.0 in 1995 and continued to drop at a slower pace to 3.2 in 1998. (EFA Committee China Report, Figure 2.20). The terms of these rates are not given.

[7] Rong, X, Shi, T. (2001). Inequality in Chinese education. Journal of Contemporary China, 10 (26):107-124.

[8] "Minority women residing in the least developed provinces were triply disadvantaged." (Rong, Shi, 2001, p.119).

[9] The National Research Center for Educational Development conducted this survey. Cited in EFA Committee (2000) 2.6.3 Coefficient of efficiency. Data is from a sample survey of primary grade 5 pupils in 35 counties.

[10] Stephens, D. (2000). Girls and Schooling in Developing Countries, International Journal of Educational Development 20 (1): 1-3.

[11] Stephens, D. (2000). Girls and basic education in Ghana: a cultural enquiry, International Journal of Educational Development 20 (1): 29-47. And

Colclough, C., Rose, P., Tembon, M. (2000). Gender inequalities in primary schooling - The roles of poverty and adverse cultural practice, International Journal of Educational Development, 20 (1): 5-27.

[12] Zhang, G. (2001, October). National Interest and Foreign Aid in China. Unpublished dissertation, 31. Kent State University.

[13] ACWF Shang Zhou (2000, May 11). Report to the Guanlan Scholarship.

[14] Shi Wen Go Village Government (2000, May 22). Letter to Guanlan's Mother.

[15] The ACWF did not mention the fate of the remaining 1,754 girls who had dropped out of school or related causes.

[16] ACWF Shang Zhou (2002, Feb 20). Report to the Guanlan Scholarship regarding 20 recipients: summary, hand written table listing 20 students, 3 narratives, thank you letter.

[17] Jing Weiling (2000, May 22). Transcript of the Scholarship Acceptance Speech.

[18] ACWF (2002) summary, as opposed to the table, gave somewhat different numbers: 4 promoted to grade 5, 1 to grade 6, and 5 to junior secondary school.

[19] It is difficult to reconcile the registration records from student to student, unless they were taken in different years, 1998-2000. They also do not match very well with the summary listings sent by Professor Zhao or the ACWF in 2002. The registration records will be assumed to be the most accurate in each individual student's case.

[20] It is questionable that any student can attain functional literacy within 3 grades of primary schooling, particularly in rural schools. For an in-depth analysis of literacy achievement by grade level, see Seeberg, 1989.
Seeberg, V. (1989). *Literacy in China.* Bochum: Brockmeyer Universitäts Verlag.

[21] This language, "struggling to advance the local economy" is part of the political rhetoric found several times in officials' letters and reports to the Guanlan Scholarship.

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